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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - UN Summit Iraq Afghanistan
PARIS - Thursday, September 15, 2005

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

1. UN Summit
2. Iraq
3. Afghanistan

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

A wide variety of domestic stories dominate today's front pages, but the UN Summit is prominently covered, with a majority of reports emphasizing that the "reform plan remains limited" (Le Monde) that "the Summit was saved at the last minute from a debacle" (Les Echos) and that President Bush, "under pressure from Katrina, could modify his policy." (Liberation) France Soir is very critical of the final agreement reached, considering it more a "show of goodwill than a plan of concrete measures." Most reports underscore PM De Villepin's "triumphant" return to the UN and recall his famous speech against a military intervention in Iraq. Le Figaro notes President Bush's new stance on terrorism and development. This afternoon's Le Monde, already available electronically, comments: "In a spectacular reversal of roles, President Bush gave 'the most UN-like speech of the day' as described by a UN officer." (See Part C)

The latest attacks in Iraq elicit grim commentary as to the security situation there. "Chaos," "civil war" and "decomposition" are some of the qualifiers used in today's reporting. (See Part C) In popular Le Parisien Antoine Basbous of the Observatory of Arab Countries says in an interview: "Zarqawi is once again targeting the Shiites, whom he considers heretics and allies of the Americans. For him, they need to be either eliminated or converted to his cause. Inevitably, this war is going to lead to Iraq's decomposition. Without a massive U.S. presence, which the Americans cannot guarantee, Iraq is on the way to decomposition."

Afghanistan and the need for the U.S. to disengage in favor of a greater European involvement are analyzed in La Croix. (See Part C) A separate report in Le Monde points to the "failed battle against drugs and corruption in Afghanistan."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

UN Summit

"Bush: Development to Counter Terrorism"

Philippe Gelie in right-of-center Le Figaro (09/15): "Bush is still holding to the same objective: to rid the world of terrorism. But he has considerably widened his perception of the 'war' triggered by 9/11. Yesterday at the UN the American President presented a more global view. While his appeal to the free world to unite against terror is not new, acknowledging that radical ideologies 'feed on anger and despair' is. The idea that developed nations have 'an obligation to help others' has taken greater importance in his approach. The U.S. President's perception of the world is now that poverty feeds terrorism, and that democracy protects peace and human rights."

"A Tribute to the UN"

Dominique Quinio in Catholic La Croix (09/15): "The UN, like the EU is part of the landscape, and no longer triggers any dreams. One tends to forget the feelings of hope it elicited when it was created. We lament its cumbersome system. and some aberrations, such as the nomination of a Libyan to head the Human Rights Commission. It is also regrettable that national interests do not disappear as if by magic when the superior interest of the world is at stake. Still, the UN has the merit of existing. The Summit will probably not give it the new impetus one hoped. But certain objectives will be reaffirmed. Let's look at the silver lining: what if the UN did not exist.?"

"The End of a Cycle"

Jean-Michel Thenard in left-of-center Liberation (09/15):
"Coincidentally, just as PM De Villepin returned to the UN

where he had tried to teach a lesson to America, President Bush was taking on responsibility for Katrina. Recognizing a mistake is not something the President does easily. but Katrina twisted his arm. and could lead the President to revise his domestic policy."

Iraq

"Iraq on the Brink of Civil War"

Thomas de Rochechouart in right-of-center France Soir (09/15):

"This latest attack is the last in a long series against the Shiites by groups close to Zarqawi, who wants to plunge the country in civil war. The political situation in Iraq has led many Sunni leaders to adopt a strategy of chaos. While the Shiites have resisted the Sunnis' attempts to provoke them, the attack on Tall Afar could be interpreted as an anti-Sunni attack. This is how Zarqawi is presenting the situation in order to incite more and more anger among the Sunnis. And so Iraq, caught in the cycle of attacks and reprisals, is on the brink of a civil war."

"Forced Cohabitation"

Jean Levallois in regional La Presse de la Manche (09/15):

"Despite the cruelty of such an acknowledgement, one is tempted to say that there was less death through violence in the days of Saddam. The collateral effects of the war in Iraq are obviously great. Here is a country that was suffering because of measures adopted against it, and which today is being confronted with a super-human task: forcing the cohabitation of groups who obviously do not want to cohabitate."

Afghanistan

"Patience"

Jean-Christophe Ploquin in Catholic La Croix (09/15): "If peace in Afghanistan manages to last, the country may well find a balance between tradition and modernism. After four years, the balance sheet for Afghanistan is rather positive. Yet Washington is showing signs of impatience. The American and the European forces present are independent from one another, and their missions differ greatly. Yet, the U.S. would like to merge them and transfer more of the burden on the Europeans. The British support the idea; the Germans do not. The French are not too keen on the plan, but believe that that this evolution is inevitable. Paris has been turning over this question for the past year. America's pressure is understandable because of the chaos in Iraq. Washington is looking to disengage from Afghanistan to re-deploy elsewhere. In Kabul, as in Baghdad, President Bush cannot help but acknowledge that promoting democracy, the mission he once again took on yesterday at the UN, is a drawn-out process. And that the U.S. cannot succeed without its allies." STAPLETON